

Hail to the Chief—wealthy celebrities bid farewell to Obama

Hiram Lee
10 January 2017

The departure of Barack and Michelle Obama from the White House in just 10 days has unleashed a torrent of praise, and some mourning, from the wealthiest layers of the celebrity elite eager to thank the outgoing president.

To provide a forum for their tributes, the Obamas hosted a farewell party at the White House over the weekend that drew a who's who from the film and music industry. Among the A-listers making the pilgrimage to Washington were music legends Paul McCartney, Stevie Wonder and Bruce Springsteen; actors Tom Hanks, Meryl Streep, George Clooney and Robert De Niro; comedians Chris Rock, Jerry Seinfeld and David Letterman; and film directors George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. A younger generation of stars, including R&B singers Solange Knowles and John Legend, and hip hop musicians Chance the Rapper and The Roots, were also on hand to celebrate and perform.

In the days leading up to the event, and helping to set the tone, a video was posted to the official YouTube channel of the White House. Called "Yes We Can: People Share Their Most Memorable Moments from the Obama Presidency," it shows a number of high-profile celebrities reflecting on the significance of the Obama presidency and recalling their favorite Obama moments and memories.

In the video, basketball legend Michael Jordan calls Obama the "Jackie Robinson of politics." Actor Leonardo DiCaprio recalls, "When I was at the UN and I heard our president say that climate change is the most important issue facing not only this generation but all future generations, it was inspiring." Singer John Legend remembers Obama's electoral victory in 2008: "I never cried before, from an election result."

Gloria Steinem, the feminist icon and one-time operative of CIA front organization Independent

Service for Information, tells the camera, "It's the first time in my life I felt like the White House belonged to everybody."

Perhaps the most informal and fawning comment came from comedian and talk show host Ellen DeGeneres. Referring to a sketch from her show filmed at a CVS pharmacy, DeGeneres said "the CVS experience with Michelle was pretty cool, and dancing with Barack at his birthday party. And he's a good dancer. He should not get any flak for that. You're a good dancer."

Others took to social media to pay tribute. Singer Solange Knowles, whose sister is superstar Beyoncé Knowles, posted a photo on Instagram showing her in rehearsals at the White House. Her caption reads: "The sound check of life...Was truly the ultimate, ultimate honor. Can't even put into words. Really. We will miss your excellence, your grace, and the phenomenal legacy you have let us all share."

Chance the Rapper tweeted prior to the event: "Bout to fly 21 hours to DC to bid farewell to the greatest president in US history. God bless you @POTUS."

The utter bankruptcy of identity politics finds expression in many of the photos and comments. Comedian Jay Pharoah posted a photo on Instagram showing himself and other African-American celebrities, adding the caption: "All that ebony at the White House..." The message from Pharoah and others was clear. "We are in the inner most circle of all circles now, the very center of wealth and power. We've made it."

Most of those participating in the White House gala and the video tribute are wealthy individuals who live in a very different world from the majority of the population. The Obama years have by and large been successful ones for them. They do not share the

hostility felt by millions toward official politics and the whole rotten system of social life in the United States. They did not reject the invitation to party with members of an administration synonymous with two terms of endless war, massive global spying operations, and unprecedented social inequality and drone assassinations. They did not, as far as any reports indicate, raise so much as a whiff of criticism while in their presence.

Actress Meryl Streep, now in the news for her anti-Trump comments during the Golden Globe ceremonies, was also at the Obama party, where she created no controversy whatsoever. Three years ago, she accepted the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Obama and was the object of his flirtations.

A simple Google search reveals the vast sums of money at the disposal of just a few of those in attendance in Washington: Tom Hanks is reported to have a net worth of \$350 million. DeGeneres stands at \$345 million. DiCaprio can claim \$245 million. Paul McCartney is a billionaire, and Jerry Seinfeld is close behind with \$820 million. Even up-and-comer Solange, considered “socially conscious” in some circles, is a millionaire 5 times over. Whether they believe it or not, the accumulation of such sums, and the social circles (and events) into which it buys one a ticket, profoundly influence their political outlook.

We are in need of oppositional and truthful artistic works, films and music. For this we need artists, filmmakers and musicians who, *in the first place*, reject everything about this milieu. Such artists are all too rare at present. The work emerging from both Hollywood and “independent” film, popular and “underground” music in recent years is sorely lacking. It will not be made better by circling in the orbit of wealth and power and by singing the praises of warmongers and spies.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)